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# Fanon

## The Octogenarian of International Revenge and the Suicide Bomber of Today

STEPHEN CHAN

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### ABSTRACT

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Frantz Fanon has always been read as an apostle of violence — much of this owed to Sartre's Preface to Fanon's work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. There are, however, more nuanced possible readings of Fanon, readings that allow the possibility of new understandings of contemporary violence emanating from the Middle East. In this article, Fanon's intellectual trajectory is traced back to his first writings postulating an equality in which no slaves existed by virtue of there being no longer any masters. The psychological dimensions of Fanon's work are discussed and a hypothesis put forward about a moment of pure psychological lucidity and calm before the suicide bomber of today explodes his or her device. The work of Lacan and Kristeva is discussed in relation to a nuanced reading of Fanon, and an excursion into the Palestine of Hamas helps complete a complex meditation on Fanon's life and work.

*Keywords:* psychology of violence; suicide bomber; violence

### The First Stage of the Prologue

The meditation of this essay began with tales of Osama Bin Laden hiding out from his United States pursuers in mountain caves, the antechambers to which were libraries whose shelves held thousands of books. The question naturally arose as to how many books it took to make a fundamentalist. Given the proliferation of private madrassa schools, and even universities offering up to PhD degrees, on the Pakistani/Afghan borderlands, and the number of Taliban (theology students) who fought, firstly against corruption, many of whom later entered the Taliban government, the second question had to ask what it was they learned. All those years of study could not have been of something simple. But, when it came to writing this essay, it became plain I could not explain anything to a Western audience without entering my subject from the perspective of Western thinkers, and a thinker appropriated by the new Western discipline of Postcolonial Studies — lazily, I think. I wanted to problematize, make complex, what has all too often been declared 'fundamentalist', and I thought I had better start with a less lazy view of Frantz Fanon himself.



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### The Second Stage of the Prologue

But then there was a problem of method. There is a fundamentalist view of Fanon too — the apostle of violence. He was as much made into this by Western thought, as I argue below, as ‘natives’ were made into artefacts of subjugation by Western colonialism. But the artefacts can reclaim their subjectivity and rise up, and Fanon himself is overdue a reclamation into a realm of complexity, ambivalence and more nuanced relationship with the ‘fundamentalist’ actions of today. I do not propose, in this instalment of a long tale, to seek to explain the thought of the madrassas, but I do wish to indicate how it is possible to arrive at a rational moment through immense detours — through a labyrinth. No one throws a bomb without first wrestling his or her own soul. Some parts of the wrestling are poetic, some parts are frenzied, not all of it can be rational or circumspectly ‘moral’. So I have written this as a series of linked detours. The links will be apparent by the end of the essay. Besides, it pays tribute to Adorno’s call for the essay as anti-totalitarian writing: it refuses arbitrary beginnings and ends. It simply starts and ends and the interim themes and detours are all there is. This was apparent more in Adorno’s musical compositions than in his own writings, but I have tried to do this here. It is also the ‘method’ of the medieval Islamic philosopher, Nasir Khusraw, and his theory of correspondences, essence and effect. Khusraw is implicated in no uprising today, but he was the controversialist of his time. Of him, too, more another time. For now, since we are dealing with things the West does not understand, we might as well use an alien method to illustrate to the rational, academic West how thought might be transacted — as the prelude to an action we also do not understand. It may not be the way Fanon thought, but I hope the reader, after this essay, will never think of Fanon in the received fashion ever again.

Frantz Fanon has faded from view. 2005 was the 80th anniversary of his birth, and some journals — mostly literary and postcolonial — marked the date. Within other literature, including that of the discipline of International Relations, there was silence. Within his profession of psychology and its offshoots, there was also silence. Asked about Fanon at the turn of the millennium, the French psycholinguist, psychoanalyst and philosopher, Julia Kristeva, remarked, ‘I have often heard people speak of him, but I have never read anything by him. He isn’t part of the mainstream of Psychoanalytic Studies’ (2002a: 110). If remembered at all, Fanon is remembered second-hand, via Jean-Paul Sartre’s sensational Preface to his posthumous work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Briefly, the Grove Press English edition, complete with its mistranslations, set the 1960s alight, but mostly as a text in the student and ghetto uprisings of that decade. In the wretched Third World, independence was already being granted. Algeria itself, which Fanon had championed, won its own independence in 1962, a year after the French edition, *Les Damnés de la terre*, appeared. The book had no effect at all on what was almost a done, if bloody, deal. Forty years later, Fanon’s residence was in the obscurity accorded him by Kristeva and most of the world’s political left.

Yet, as the world labours through the millennium's first decade, might there not be some growing echo of Fanon's anger, and his diagnosis of what anger meant and does — what it propels people to do? From the dispossession of white farmers in Zimbabwe, to the determined suicide bombers of the Middle East, are there the heirs to Fanon's thought who explode their traumatized psychologies outwards? Those acts of subjugation by the French in Algeria, so memorably captured in Assia Djebar's novel *Fantasia* (1993) or Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers*, the immense insouciance of white settlers in Fanon's native Martinique, so well caught in David Macey's biography (2000: ch. 2), and their scorn of 'natives', replicating and replicated by white settlers in an array of colonies and protectorates, all the official and casual denigrations and exploitations — are such things forgotten? Is political independence also a clinical cleansing of injury and memory? And what if such injuries and insults are perpetuated by more modern means within a contemporary International Relations of power and wilful cultural ignorance? In the light of such questions, perhaps it is time to look at Fanon again.

As for *The Battle of Algiers*, it opens with a harrowing scene of execution. One of the Algerian rebel leaders is dragged from his cell in an immense prison block. The view of the camera is the view of the other prisoners. He is short and would want to walk with dignity to the scaffold, but the guards are tall and burly and almost lift him under the arms in their rapid march to the guillotine. Perhaps his feet are lifting, trying to keep pace; perhaps they are sliding. His face does its best to keep its composure. He has a moustache. The end is swift. It is seen from above, where prisoners in the highest cells overlooking the courtyard might see it. He is hauled onto the scaffold, a hood placed over his head, he is stretched out lying face down on the gurney, and the blade drops. From reaching the scaffold to death is less than five seconds. Everyone in the cinema is wondering if they could do so well in that last frog-march to extinction. And then the people in their seats can breathe in again.

The film is the cinematic equivalent of Fanon's writing and, being film, engages people's attention without the distraction of thought. That comes later. The idea of dying, of being prepared to die, of dying calmly, for a political goal and as a political protest is, in that brief cinema moment, unreflexive. Perhaps there is a genuine state of mind that is calm and unreflexive as the finger detonates the bomb. If there is cool lucidity, in that nano-second before death, that is a world's distance from the anger that is associated with Fanon.

In fact, there are two aspects of the Sartre Preface, and both are caricatures. The first is exactly the enunciation of anger, fury: 'By this mad fury, by this bitterness and spleen, by their ever-present desire to kill us, by the permanent tensing of powerful muscles which are afraid to relax, they have become men' (Sartre, 1967: 15). One almost expects the prescription next of big black cocks impaling white women. The second is more pernicious. It is about the Wretched Martyr. Why does he expose himself to death? 'He considers himself a potential corpse. He will be killed; not only does he accept this risk, he's sure of it. This potential dead man has lost his wife and children ... he is too weary of it all. But this weariness of the heart is the root of unbelievable courage' (Sartre, 1967: 20). So we have tensed muscles and weariness beyond

contemplation. And that is the root of the grand flaw in Sartre's Preface: to the native is accorded all justice, or justification, except the act of thought and the condition of philosophy.

On the 80th anniversary of Fanon's birth the distinguished postcolonial scholar, Robert Young, relaboured Sartre's view of Fanon. Young tried to nuance the meaning of Fanon for today's readers: 'The claims of *The Wretched of the Earth* are, in a sense, performative. ... They are an act of persuasion, trying to achieve a cathartic, almost somatic, effect on the reader, propelling him or her into committed activism' (Young, 2005: 38). Neither Sartre nor Fanon equalized the genders in their urges to violence. Young, like Sartre, accepts the violence in Fanon. It is almost a 'physical sympathy' — beyond mere ideological solidarity. And somehow 'the violence of the trapped nation becomes as physical as that of the oppressed individual' (Young, 2005: 39). At the stroke of the performative pen, then, the transition from traumatized and violent individual to traumatized and violent nation is made. What I want to do in this essay is to problematize such statements, and then to reintroduce them, problematically nuanced, into the International Relations of today.

The point to note about Fanon's writing is how eloquently his points are made. These are intellectual works. They are premeditated. Similarly, there is not too much that is spontaneously furious in Pontecorvo's cinematic protagonists. Before the advent in the late twentieth century of suicide bombers in Israeli marketplaces, cafes and bars, there were the female basket bombers of Algiers. The planning involved getting the bombs, hidden in baskets, past the French checkpoints; their almost gentle manipulation into place under restaurant tables — these were a prefigure of the belted suicide bombers of a descendant generation, with their videoed farewell messages, saying goodbye to loved ones while carefully dressed in battle costumes, before strapping on the belt of bombs, inevitably contemplating how one would explode inwards as well as outwards, the guts violently fragmenting, before strapping it on anyway and going out and doing it. There is a lucid interval between the act of being denigrated and the act of violent revenge. Just as, in the attack of 9/11, there were months of preparation and training, learning how to fly, waiting for the moment to be activated, boarding the planes without losing their nerves. Far more so than in the Algiers of half a century ago, the prolonged interval of rationally mastering technology is not an interval that is sustained by fury alone.

Did Fanon write only about fury? He actually wrote a great deal, most of his writings up to 1957 being scientific papers published in medical journals. After that time, the political pieces increased in number, and many of these were reprinted as parts of his more famous books, but, as late as 1959, two years before his death, Fanon published his last paper on psychiatry (although some of his psychiatric studies were posthumously published).<sup>1</sup> Four books bear his name as author. These are *Black Skin, White Masks* (French edition 1952, first English edition 1968), *Studies in a Dying Revolution* (French edition, *L'An V de la Revolution Africaine*, 1959, first English edition 1970), *The Wretched of the Earth* (French edition 1961, first English edition 1965), and what is largely a collection of previously published essays, *Toward the African Revolution* (French edition 1964, first English edition 1970). The point about

all these works is that Fanon's posthumous reputation rests on just two aspects of his work. The first is the generalized description of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which is to do with an enunciation of 'Negro' subjectivity vis-à-vis the white man's subjectivity, with frequent allusions to a certain comparability between the low regard with which both Negroes and Jews are held. Homi Bhabha's Foreword to the 1986 Pluto edition is somewhat more nuanced than Sartre's Preface. Yet it is precisely Sartre's Preface that constitutes the second aspect of Fanon's reputation. In a way, Fanon will never escape Sartre — who turned Fanon into a manifesto of violence. But *The Wretched of the Earth*, which is a generalized but not often fully read text, is itself the third aspect of the memory of Fanon — not that it is fully read, if it is read at all, but that it was written at a key moment of European and American appreciation of a European project of denigration that had lasted hundreds of years. Briefly, the American Black Panthers also recognized what the book could mean in the USA, before the radical black movement succumbed to a home-grown ideological leadership. Almost no one reads Fanon now and, when they do, they may be surprised to discover that there is only one (though long) chapter dedicated to violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The last major chapter of the book is in fact a collection of psychiatric case studies that illustrate Fanon's earlier points certainly, but which are written with the same effort at clinical detachment that one might find in psychiatric case studies anywhere. The two books on African revolution were very much works of their era. One was largely concerned with the Algerian struggle, the other was a compilation of articles. No one remembers Michel Debre any more, for instance, but the former French leader and dozens of his generation march — without any impact in 2005 — through the commentaries that make up these books. In some ways, *Black Skin, White Masks* is the angriest of all his works. It was published when Fanon was only 28, a year after his graduation as a medical doctor. It was probably prepared contemporaneously with his graduation thesis — indeed, Fanon first intended it to be the thesis itself — and is, properly in any intellectual history, student writing. This is not to say juvenilia; much of it is clear and mature, but it is an uneven text and those excavating it for radical wisdom need to do so with care. Because its first audience had been intended as medical examiners, it is intensely technical, although some of Fanon's psychological and medical terminology is more influenced by his literary and metaphoric ambitions than by strict science. It is also an assemblage of philosophical influences. Sartre is clearly there, and there is also some early Lacan. But it is precisely an assemblage. This is not a book of conceptual rigour or even coherence. What it does is to establish the beginning of a coherent political and polemical literary and mobilizing project for Fanon. It was, as it were, a young man's great firecracker to be tossed into the world.

The problem is that, at that time, many firecrackers were being tossed. When it was published, Fanon's book was almost totally ignored. What gained attention in the same year, 1952, was Camus's *l'Homme Révolté*, and the great quarrel between Camus and Sartre. Fashions change of course, but, in the 1960s, when the largely forgotten 'Michael X' tried to replicate the US black power movement in Britain, he sported an Afro (like Eldridge Cleaver), his

bodyguards wore suits and glasses like the retinue of Malcolm X, and he carried a copy of *The Rebel*, the English translation of Camus's text. There was no English translation of *Peau Noir, Masques Blanc* until 1968, and its impact was long in coming. Michael X would probably still have clutched Camus, and it is important to note that the existential movement of Paris — whether Camus and Sartre quarrelled or not — was what drove the intellectual motor of despair, futility, criminality, violence and revolt. It was the immediate ancestor of transgression as a political act. Fanon was, to that extent, a child of his times as well as the original protagonist of a 'Negro's' capacity also for rebellion, and the psychological determinism behind rebellion — caused in the 'Negro's' case by racism's determinism. The logic of denigration as a downwards imposition is recognizable enough; the meditation on how this denigration ruminates in the subjectivity of the recipient at the bottom is Fanon's imperfect but fiery accomplishment.

Even so, the work to a great extent creates a new stereotype: no longer the 'Negro' who is denigrated, but the 'Negro' who is able to free himself from mental acceptance of slavery via anguish and then the drive to recognition of himself on the same level as Hegel's 'masters' — no longer a slave, but not a master either, because a world without slaves is also a world without masters. Fanon sought an equality of possibilities. This much separates *Black Skin, White Masks* from Sartre's rendition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, where it seemed that destruction was inevitably a goal in itself, not equality. But what unites the two books is Fanon's depiction of the universal condition of 'Negro' slavery. There is very little differentiation here among those with black skin. Despite the fact that Fanon addresses his 'Negro' to Adler, to Hegel; despite a multitude of specific cultural references, including to Van Gogh and Tchaikowsky (*sic*); the 'Negro' is himself homogenous. Denigration is what makes him homogenous, undifferentiated even in his psychopathology (especially in his psychopathology). As a generalized object of denigration he is comparable to the generalized Jew. He is the generalized threat of a great genital protuberance (even though Fanon almost pedantically assures his readers that the average length of an African penis is 4.6244 inches). How then does a generalized slave achieve the specific subjectivity of freedom, that individualized sense of liberty? This is where Fanon's work is a failure, in that it never rises above its categories. *Black Skin, White Masks* may well be the discovered text of Postcolonial Studies in the later twentieth century, but only because it accommodated the generalizations of 'self' and 'other', particularly the black person/the black nation/blackness as a great Other.

There is, however, a great complication that is momentarily explicit in Fanon: 'The Negro problem does not resolve itself into the problem of Negroes living among white men but rather Negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist, capitalist society that is only accidentally white' (1986: 202). There is a lurch here, suddenly, from generalized blackness to an economic and imperialized condition. The mixture of pathology and economic structuration is never explored or even hypothesized beyond a preliminary point. And, if accidental whiteness, is blackness also accidental? For the 'Negro' was never alone in his denigration. His benchmark was never only the Jew. What about the huge masses of imperialized Indians, Chinese, etc.?

And, if all are the accidental victims of colonialism, is the imperial structure given to exact replications of the same colonialism? Is every denigration the same? And is every struggle and rise towards recognition of self as free subject the same? Fanon spoke as a person from Martinique. He was not yet a colleague of the Algerian struggle, although he worked among North African diasporas in France as a young doctor. When he did affiliate himself to Algeria he found in the colonial situation there two striking symmetries with his own experience: both Martinique and Algeria were French colonies, and both were settler colonies. On that basis, without much experience of the rest of the world, Fanon spoke for most of the rest of the world.

This is where someone like Sartre should have known better. But the clarion lines that open his Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* are a huge generalization submerged in rhetoric: 'Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men and one thousand five hundred million natives.' Now, in fact, the 'natives' of whom Sartre wrote were entirely depicted as Africans, somehow mixing into one the denigrations of Arab Africans and black Africans proper, somehow depicting the archetype that is Sartre's continental 'native' as moving inexorably towards one type of explosive release and murderous rebellion. In Fanon's own text, this generality is central. South Africa under apartheid is briefly mentioned, but national differentiations seldom complexly intrude. The great contrast in *The Wretched of the Earth* is between this manifesto of the insurgent 'Negro'/native/Other and the specific clinical case notes of mental disorders elaborated in the last chapter. These cases, all Algerian, illustrate a certain common origin of disorder, but all express individual subjectivities. Fanon's effort to establish, if not a typology then a list of conditions or symptoms arising from maltreatment only illustrates just how specifically and individually his Algerian case studies responded to duress. To expand this sort of exercise outwards to Sartre's entire 'one thousand five hundred million natives' would build an increasing contrast between a monolithic oppression and numberless responses/accommodations/resistances/rebellions. And yet the echo of what seems a monolithic oppression is still heard, or recollected. In a rare, sometimes candid interview in 2005, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe said: 'Memories do pile up, but the most remote ones, especially those which saw us suffer and the times when we were under real bondage, under colonial rule, those can never fade away, they remain forever.'<sup>2</sup> There is the echo of trauma here, of a certain psychopathology perhaps — which has determined contemporary politics. In that same interview, Mugabe specifically included Algeria's Ben Bella — the man who won Fanon's Algerian struggle — as an exemplar of African personality and political consciousness. Whether Fanon was prophetic, or whether he has been adopted beyond his own limited experience, are questions which can still be asked. Can they, however, be asked beyond Africa?

### The Recognition of Abjection

Julia Kristeva, who has not read Fanon, wrote what many might regard as her most powerful book on a theme reminiscent of what we have come to

regard as Fanonian. Her long essay on abjection (1982) concerned the powers of horror and the enigmatic cleansing that horror can bring. However, the powers of horror constitute a perversion of what is finally truly human. They are not a mature substitute for beauty or love. I want to look briefly at Kristeva's meditation on horror and abjection, but it is well to recall the *opus* in which this work sits. Albeit with a complex neo-Freudian apparatus, for Kristeva beauty and love are integrated with each other. In fact, the search for beauty and its recognition are what make love realizable (Kristeva, 1987). Love allows the unity not only of two people, but of the individual psyche. It is accepting, fulfilling and transformative — overcoming horror. But all this entails complex internal workings within each person. Each has much to overcome. Kristeva draws upon Melanie Klein and her work on the rejecting drive. But she also recognizes that, in Sartre's great work, *Being and Nothingness*, there is a critical difference between thoughtful negation and a certain ecstasy — a primordial annihilation, a nothingness, a repulsion against thought that is a freedom (Sartre, 1956; Kristeva, 2002b: 8–9; Kristeva, 2002c). In this sense, Sartre's view of Fanon merely made Fanon reductively Sartrian, in the mode of thoughtlessness. For Kristeva, however, the movement away from annihilation towards completeness is a movement accomplished by beauty towards love and towards a certain feminine condition and a certain methodology of becoming feminine. Even writers such as Aragon, upon the Kristeva couch, are found within this feminine methodology (Kristeva, 2002b: 182–3), and of course other French psychoanalysts/philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari have written extensively of 'becoming woman', amidst a range of 'becomings' that lose the visible traces of normal identity and ascription (2003: ch. 10). This explains why Kristeva is problematic to many Anglophonic feminists outside French debate, but it also makes her a philosopher of abjection in passing, that is as it passes towards beauty and then love. She does not dismiss abjection and horror. For her it is not an end-result, but she takes it seriously.

The seeming drawback of Kristeva's method is her seeking of abjection in literature. What is written becomes fundamental evidence for her. A great deal of her book, *Powers of Horror*, is devoted to Céline — an author of considerable controversy, to the point of being described by others (Sartre being one) as noxious in his right-wing views, a sometime apologist for Hitler, an anti-Semite who was curiously admiring of the race that disgusted him. Kristeva finds his writing ecstatic and neutral at the same time. Celine is not repelled by his subject matter — which is often excrement, death and decay — but writes about it with such energy and vividness that he seems a devotee. His accounts of casualties on the field of war are gruesome, macabre and open-bowelled. In short, the defilement is out in the open. The opened, and dead, body (and what extrudes from it) becomes a metaphor of all else that may be expellable; it is a metaphor for the mindlessness of great catharsis, when great emotion is expelled outwards from the mind, if not the soul. When that happens, thought, reflexivity, empathy are all sacrificed. They cannot stand in the way of the almighty, in this case the might of abjection. 'The object is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes

advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life ... it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss' (Kristeva, 1982: 15–16).

This is not to say therefore that there is no law, no rule, no prohibition, no thought, no reflexivity, no empathy. In fact, they are all present in the first instance. However, the compulsion towards abjection is so great that nothing can stand in its way, except that it is that same law or rule that is used in a corrupt or perverse manner. It is this point by Kristeva which takes us further forward than Sartre's contemplation of Fanon. To the native was denied all philosophy; to the abjector belongs an apparatus which is made perverse. What unites both, however, is that moment of explosiveness. In a very real way, Sartre was racist. The native has muscle and weariness. The Islamic suicide bomber of today — though a clear step removed from Kristeva's literary meditations — is invested with complex theology, complexly perverted but, for so many, purely vindicated at the nub of detonation.

### Madness and Law

I now take the genealogy of this essay forward. Lacan was an intellectual echo, in key respects of both Fanon and Kristeva. Here I look at his treatment of Sophocles' *Antigone* — although Lacan treats less the play as a whole and more his sense of Antigone, the eponymous lead character. It is a key aspect of his famous Seminar or Symposium, and he uses it in part to lodge an attack on Kant. It has been remarked that Antigone, in risking — indeed courting — execution to bury her rebel brother, fulfilled a higher moral law. Indeed, the play itself speaks of a co-joint law of filial piety and respect for the dead. But her brother had rebelled against the state and, having fallen outside the gates of Thebes, his body is ordered to be left unburied and to rot as a symbol of communitarianism and its collective triumph. The regent, Creon, says:

No man who is his country's enemy  
 Shall call himself my friend. Of this I am sure —  
 Our country is our life; only when she  
 Rides safely, have we any friends at all.  
 Such is my policy for our common weal.<sup>3</sup>

This is a perfectly respectable statement of commonwealth, community welfare and protection. The rights of any citizen, including to burial, reside in friendship to the collective whole. Antigone is the one who problematizes this. Against the laws of the state, and the rights accorded by the state, she seems to counterpose higher law. It is the natural order, it is a cosmological expectation that the dead be buried to facilitate their entry into the community of souls; to respect their time on earth and to respect their transition to a different order of existence. This, in reflexive International Relations' basic contemporary binary, is a Kantian cosmopolitanism seeking to defy a communitarian edict.

Lacan will have none of this. To him, Antigone is unreasonable. Not only is the *jouissance* of Antigone complex, but she is in fact mad. She is driven by *Ate*, wherein the good impulse is prepared to prosecute itself within a fervour that is mad.<sup>4</sup> For Creon is perfectly reasonable as well as respectable in his view of community welfare; his discharge of his duties as regent is also reasonable and respectable; not only that, but he has taken Antigone into his own household after the death of her dishonoured father, Oedipus, and provided for her — and in the standoff between himself and Antigone gives her every chance to recant. A later version of Sophocles' play, that by Jean Anouilh, also depicts Antigone as the *demandeur mal* — the person who insists on going beyond reason for the sake of an unattainable purity, an original innocence.<sup>5</sup> Here, she is the mad spoilt teenager. Even so, neither Lacan nor Anouilh says she is wrong. Kant may be wrong, but Lacan is not saying Antigone is. Rather, she is (Lacan) good and mad; (Anouilh) pure and mad. In short, higher law is not necessarily observed by rational, sane and ordered means. There is a morality that is frenzied, at the moment of its enactment insane, but able to be seen afterwards as true. But what sort of frenzy? Antigone, in her exchanges with Creon and her asides to her sister, is perfectly lucid and cool. In terms of the decision she has made she behaves rationally — but she will not deviate from that decision despite every other form of reason. She has thought about it. The contemplation of morality to the point, or within the point, of *Ate* is what concerns us in today's International Relations.

### From the Singular to the Plural

The use of the literary by Kristeva is not necessarily an effete form of evidence. Lacan's use of Sophocles, Sartre's investigations of, among others, Genet, Fanon's own frequent reference to literary texts — particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* — is at least evidence of the power of metaphor embedded in literature. Here, metaphor is both a meditation on possibility (a conjunction of fantasy and reality) and a mediation of reality when it becomes too harsh and the suffering subject needs a transport into new ways of seeing and acting. Paul Ricoeur — like Lacan and Kristeva, and even Fanon — made his own enquiry into Freud (Ricoeur, 1970). In Ricoeur's interpretation, each subject contains a mixed cocktail that does service as a structure of explanation. A language of force (drive, cathexis, condensation, displacement, regression) is mixed with a language of meaning. In many subjects this mixture will result in a disproportion of subjectivity; there is, borrowing Pascal, an 'ontology of disproportion'. There is a 'wounded cogito'. It is this disproportion, this ontology, this wound that inflects not history as history (certain things happened at a certain time), but history as it is narrated, i.e. history itself becomes a form of literature, infused with the disproportion of the narrator and the metaphors he or she must use (Ricoeur, 1983, 1984, 1985).<sup>6</sup> In this sense, history has been affected by Fanon and his narration of the 'Negro's' view of it. History becomes contested by differing disproportionate subjects, and every writing

of history establishes a contest, if not a conflict. For Ricoeur, it is as an ontological and personal condition is narrated outwards, and as that narration is taken up in key literary, anthemic, or holy books — or commentaries on those books — that history allows a glimpse of the future. The bridge of possibility is built upon a narration of the ‘realities’ of the past.

Perhaps those possible futures involve a redressing, a balancing of the disproportions of the past. Perhaps, as in landmark organs such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and its literature of recorded catharsis, apology and revelation, it involves a forgiveness of the disproportions of the past. Either way, the history of the future is mapped according to the narratives of history gone before. Every video released by a suicide bomber maps a history, and narrates it coolly, before heading out towards the climax of *Ate’*.

The suicide warrior in fact has a long, multicultural history. The 300 Spartans knew they would die at Thermopylae — and chose to die even after receiving offers of honourable surrender from Xerxes. Japanese *kamikaze* pilots flew their bombs against American warships. The original contemporary use of the explosive-belted suicide bomber was by the Tamil Tigers. Their bombers were usually women, and one succeeded in blowing up Prime Minister Ghandi of India. The tactics of today’s Palestinian and other Islamic fighters are in fact borrowed. But so too is the methodology of thoughtful self-justification and construction of just cause. The legendary Spartan code and the Japanese code of *bushido* were internalized by their suicide warriors. They didn’t go out to face the two million Persians, or walk down their final runway, without thinking much on their texts, their received narratives, their views of history and, finally, their sense of an inward disproportion being greatly outweighed by the disproportionate odds they faced: two million Persian soldiers led by the crack Immortals unit; the looming triumph of the great, victorious US war fleets that had somehow risen like fresh phoenixes from the worst the Japanese could throw at them at Pearl Harbour. And here is the final ingredient in this essay’s own cocktail of explanation — or investigation towards an explanation — and that is the outward-lookingness of disproportion. In a sense, this is a variation (although Kristeva might describe it as a perversion) of Augustine’s proportionate response: it is a disproportionate response against a history of disproportionate offence. And it is contemplated thoughtfully, textually, coolly, before slaughter is caused in a final moment of calm lucidity. Of all those ingredients, the anger ascribed to Fanon may be only one among many, and a dwarfed one at that. But the cool contemplation of violent literature, of violent history, of the violent possibility towards the future, of violent disproportion — all these animate a movement towards a terrorism that is sustained in its determination by the same measured but undeviating *Ate’* that Lacan found in Antigone, and which may suggest a more accurate reading of Fanon.

Now there is a sense that the underdevelopment of technology also plays a part. Against the great technologized war machines, only the suicide bomber can make a response. There is no technologized war machine of his or her own to fall back upon. Indeed, the charges of indiscriminate slaughter made

against the suicide bombers could be as easily made against the carpet bombers of Dresden or the atomic bombers of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Only when the West had developed a technology of 'precision bombing' (faulty as that is) did it move towards 'discrimination'. But precisely because United States and Western global domination seem indiscriminate, the paradox only adds to the sense of the great powers as disproportionate in their view of the rest of the world. Here it might become possible again to write a variation of Sartre: the earth numbers three billion inhabitants, and two-thirds of them are without thought and so may be treated thoughtlessly.

### **The Clash of Agendas**

There is not so much a clash of civilizations as a clash of agendas. In the early twenty-first century there is, on the one side, the new Realism of the Bush/Rumsfeld axis; on the other, there is a 'crazed' normative vision — which I outline below. A word, first, on the new Realism: it is in fact a combination of three earlier variations of Realism. Firstly, it is a 'classical' Realism, an attempt at blanket, global domination, with the protection and prosecution of US and then Western interests firmly at its core. Secondly, as Baldwin (1979) and Hart (1976) once protagonized, it is a Realism that has specific strategic points which it seeks to control: it seeks control over resources, over actors, and control over events and outcomes. Thirdly, it is a technologized Realism, with the introduction of new weapons or the conversion of old ones. The release, finally, of the Pentagon's new 'Long War' strategic doctrine in February 2006, with the spread of militant Islam as its primary concern, incorporated all three Realisms.<sup>7</sup> What the Long War Realism is not, however, is a doctrine of deterrence; it is a doctrine of intervention. It is not a doctrine of graduated and proportionate response; it is a doctrine of hegemony. And it is not a doctrine of military alliances with equal partners; it is a doctrine with subservient military partners. The increase of 'special operations' forces, to 52,000, means that these units alone will be half the size of the entire army of the US's closest ally, Britain. The US is not seeking to withdraw to a Western heartland, as Samuel Huntington seemed to recommend, but to dominate and pacify all heartlands.

Against this Realism is what I deliberately wish to call a new normative agenda. It is not the Kantian/cosmopolitan agenda of higher law and natural justice, with its categorical imperative that individuals should also behave justly. It is not a normativity set within a beautiful universe. It is set within a world where natural justice seems no longer to find an echo in the policies of the great powers. It is a world where the majority of its subjects suffer a 'wounded cogito', an ontology of vehemence (to use another term from Ricoeur), and disproportionate subjectivity. It is a world seeking abjection and, even though Kristeva would call it a perversion, it is ready to use its textual and legal instruments and thinking to establish a foundation justification for its actions. In short, it assumes a normative mission to answer disproportion with disproportion. It is the reverse décor of Kant: a normativity of natural injustice or unnatural justice. It has its own technological tools — electronic communications, money transfers, as well as the obvious

weaponries — but, precisely because it is technologized and textualized, narrated from texts and bodies of law, even if perversely, and requires much planning, preparation and training, it transforms raw anger into a cooler frenzy than Sartre allowed Fanon, but which Lacan allowed Antigone. There are no rock-hard muscled natives here.

Indeed, it is the truer Fanon who is lost here. He wanted to fight because he felt Africa and Africans had no choice. But what he fought for was an equality of proportion. If there were no slaves, there would no longer be any masters. There would be a unity, an equality and end to the disproportion of the ownership of one by another. The ‘apostle of violence’ might not have much liked our world had he lived longer. Indeed, he might have been writing clinical case notes on how the traumatized adopt trauma as their own weapon, and the psychological disjunction that must be bridged to move from the disorientation of the traumatized to the rational and cool planning of today’s traumatizer. All the case notes in the last part of *The Wretched of the Earth* are of people who, though with different responses to trauma, would not easily make this transition. Or perhaps his case studies might have been of what Kristeva would call the narcissism of the videos made by bombers before their suicides: the advertisement of oneself as about to die for just cause. Or perhaps, in the context of 1950s France and its philosophers like Camus, Fanon might have looked into the abyss opening in our world and found it all, perhaps inevitable, perhaps on one side justified, but absurd.

### Reflexivity in Unusual Places

I have posited a story about the Fanon of today — but he is dead and the story is unprovable. The story all the same invites Fanon to a reflexivity, or invites him to invite in turn his interpreters to a reflexivity. This essay now suggests an implicit reflexivity, a space for thought (and discussion, even negotiation) within the foundation of Hamas, in 2006 the surprise government of the Palestinian Administrative Authority but, up till then, associated with terrorism and suicide bombing. Even in 1994, Edward Said dismissed Hamas as ‘a protest movement against the Israeli occupation’. Its actual ideas of statehood, even Islamic statehood, were ‘inchoate and completely unconvincing to anybody who lives there’, as were its ideas on economics, power stations and housing (Ali, 2006: 90–1).<sup>8</sup> Clearly, its ideas and deeds became more convincing in the dozen years since Said’s judgement. In 1994, however, Hamas was young. It was officially created on 8 December 1987, and its Charter was not released until 18 August 1988.<sup>9</sup> What is surprising about the Charter is its attempt at nuance. What I want to say here is that, notwithstanding all discussion of *Ate’*, cool frenzy and reflective madness, there is also reflection itself, reflection in its ‘sane’ and measured, externally conscious, mode, i.e. unlike *Ate’* pure, it is not directed solely towards an internal impulse of sacrifice, suicide and slaughter.

There are parts of the Charter that are as might be expected. The protagonizing of *jihad* as a violent, and obligatory, means of liberation (Article 15) takes *jihad* in its contemporary meaning — that is violent resistance and

ideological education towards resistance. It does not matter that many Islamic scholars view this meaning as a narrowing and corruption of the original intent of the term. This is what it means now, and this is what it means in the Hamas Charter — the same Charter that rejects international conferences, peace initiatives and negotiation (Article 13). The most chilling Article is the eighth, which is a brief poem:

God is its goal;  
The messenger is its leader.  
The Quran is its Constitution.  
Jihad is its methodology, and  
Death for the sake of God is its most coveted desire.

Having recounted that, a careful reading of the Charter and subsequent Hamas documents reveals some cracks in the façade of violence and non-negotiation. Firstly, the Charter stresses that Hamas is a nationalist movement (Article 12). The pull of the nationalist cause, against which ‘nothing is loftier’, is such that ‘a woman may go fight without her husband’s permission’ (Article 12). In short, the necessity of nationalism and its defence overrides Islamic convention.<sup>10</sup> The extent of that nationalism, however, is debatable. Although the Charter stresses that all of Palestine must be liberated, later documents confine themselves to the occupied territories. There thus developed an interim set of objectives as well as long-term objectives, and the interim objectives have become increasingly solidified as the core of Hamas nationalism. In rejecting the Shultz/Mubarak 10-point plan for self-rule, the Hamas official statement nevertheless made what it called a reiteration, but which was a variation. It reminded readers that it had vowed never to ‘cede the larger part of Palestine to the Zionist enemy’.<sup>11</sup> This was a significant variation on the totality of its original claim.

In a 1996 memorandum to Arab heads of state and government, Hamas laid out what was basically a recognition of United Nations resolutions, and a code of war. This code is extraordinary and, even though it was subsequently and frequently breached, its enunciated principles nevertheless suggest a sense of self-limitation is a current within Hamas. In brief, the code limited armed confrontations to those against military units; it sought to avoid civilian targets, including women, children and the elderly; it sought to avoid gratuitous mutilation and killing; it sought to avoid targeting Western individuals or interests within or without the occupied territories; and it undertook to limit military engagements to those within the occupied territories, i.e. it would not carry its fight into Israel itself.<sup>12</sup> The parameters I have noted surrounding *jihad*, United Nations resolutions, statehood under a nationalist rubric, and a sense of proper ‘Augustinian’ proportion in the struggle for statehood, together with the concept of ‘necessity’ overcoming normal Islamic barriers, allow a view of Hamas that goes beyond suicide bombing, and the *Ate*’ involved. They also suggest that *jihad*, rather than being debated as a ‘true’ or corrupt teaching, may be profitably addressed within these parameters.

Certainly the idea of Hamas as non-monolithic and, indeed, as in part modernistic, was suggested in an interview with one of the new female Hamas MPs on the eve of her entering parliament in February 2006.

Women in Gaza and the West Bank should be given complete rights. Some women and girls are made to marry someone they don't want to marry. That is not our religion, it's our tradition. In our religion, a woman has the right to choose.

As a woman and an MP, there are areas I want to concentrate on but that does not mean we have forgotten our struggle for our homeland, and preparing our children to die when the homeland calls for it.<sup>13</sup>

This was a curious statement with careful reference points. There is an assertion of female rights within the domestic sphere uttered by someone who had attained rights in the public sphere. There is a clear distinction made between Islam and tradition and, implicitly, between rights and conservatism. There is a reminder that a nationalist project is still in operation — but the reminder that people must still die is made with reference to the 'homeland', to the need for nation, and not with reference to Islam. I have sought to illustrate, from the documents cited above, that these points of delineation have always been implicit in Hamas — even amidst a huge array of crossover points which seem to have privileged Islam as a motivating and justifying force. However, given the range of backgrounds of the new MPs, the organization is not populated only by suicide bombers of the Sartre nativist-fury and anger type. It has sent out its fair share of suicide bombers, but there is an *Ate'* here that is part of the cooler, more lucid, fury to which I have hoped to rescue Fanon. And, even within contemporary political Islam, there would be much to debate. *Jihad*, after all, doesn't have to be hot war. It can be the sort of controlled confrontation that the Iranian Ahmadinejad government is trying to conduct with the United States and the West. It is a confrontation perhaps reminiscent of Krushchev banging his shoe on his lectern at the United Nations, haranguing and condemning, prophesying the defeat of the West — but never wanting to pull the trigger. In the cases of both Iran and the Hamas government of Palestine, time will tell who will first pull the trigger.

### By Way of Conclusion

I am not saying *Ate'* is negotiable, or that it can negotiate. I am saying that it is multi-dimensional, that it plans and contemplates within the fury from which it originated. It takes rational decisions and makes rational plans within its own parameters. It is able to establish interim objectives. When the moment comes to hurl the bomb, or detonate the belt of explosives, it may be done with a lucidity and calmness that identifies itself with an end of reflection and an end of fury.

I am saying that this cannot be debated, modulated or moderated beyond a certain point by etymological and theological statements that, e.g. *jihad* properly means something other than a war or crusade. It can be moderated

when the cause of fury is ameliorated to the point of insignificance. Antigone needed to bury her dead brother. Until then, Creon — with all his reasonable ideas about communal good and communal purpose — was someone simply to be defied. It is the son of Creon, Haemon, linked by blood to his father and by love to Antigone, who is the voice of reason and of interrogation. But he sides with Antigone. Love for her; love of a democratic state beyond the edicts of a single person, Creon; and acknowledgement of natural, higher law make Haemon finally partially Kantian — but also within that apotheosis sought by Kristeva, moving beyond the perversion of abjection and its fury and dying himself for love. Lacan leaves Haemon out of his seminar, but for Sophocles and, much later, Anouilh, he is the key minor variable in their plays — minor, but still a variable. Perhaps the role of intellectuals today is to play that part of the enunciator of the variable. To move on from the brilliant but shoddy Sartre, the generalizer of all the world's rebellion as an expression of naked anger. Fanon himself was more than that. Those who wear the belts of bombs today surely also.

But there is a little postscript here. Sartre was shoddy but brilliant. Those who have read Sartre only as a preface to Fanon will not appreciate this. So let us loop back to our Prologue with a little sting in our tail — for further thought. For Fanon, because colonization was violent, de-colonization has had the seeds of violence already planted within it. It is a replacement of one species of man, the colonizer, by another — the freed 'native'. The two species, as articulated by both Fanon and Sartre, are mutually antagonistic. They will fight. However, Fanon was also interested in another replacement, contemporaneous and more fundamental. He wished to replace the abject 'native' with a free man who stood alongside other free men in a world without masters. He wanted to destroy a state of servitude and allow the truest creativity and expression of self. When looked at in this way, perhaps Fanon is indeed indebted to Sartre — for Sartre's own method in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* was to propose a two-fold relationship within the existing state of affairs. A 'project' is negative, in that it seeks to destroy what exists; however, it is also positive, in that it seeks to open onto something which does not yet exist.<sup>14</sup> What is here is the leap into the future, and it is this leap that is transformative. Perhaps this might be expressed also in another vocabulary — that of our Prologue's Khusraw. Fanon's fighter rises to his true *essence* and overcomes the *effect* of violent colonialism.

To leap, to throw, to explode — these things are not always what they first and narrowly seem.

## Notes

1. For what is probably the best bibliography of his works, see Macey (2000).
2. Interview with Robert Mugabe (2005), 'We won't go back to the Commonwealth', *New African* (No. 441, June), p. 6 of its Special Report.
3. Sophocles (trans. E. F. Watling 1974), *Antigone in Three Theban Plays* (London: Penguin), p. 131.
4. See Lacan (1992: 190) for his view of Antigone's *jouissance* and p. 263 for his view of her *Ate*'.

5. For a discussion of both Lacan's and Anouilh's *Antigone*, and their relation to International Relations, see Chan (2003a).
6. For an extended article on Ricoeur and his importance for International Relations, see Chan (2003b).
7. This was the Pentagon's four-yearly strategic review, but the Long War doctrine replaced the War on Terror sound bite of the early Bush years. For an extensive description of the review, see the special report in *The Guardian* (London), 15 February 2006, pp. 19–21.
8. This book contains the transcripts of Ali's 1994 interviews with Said for British Channel 4 TV.
9. I have used the Charter as appended to Hroub (2000), Document 2 of the Appendix.
10. The doctrine of necessity, of necessitous acts being undertaken despite Islamic law or Quranic indictment, is also a key aspect of the Iranian Constitution. See Schirazi (1998).
11. Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas ) Introductory Memorandum, undated, Document 3 in the Appendix to Hroub (2000).
12. An Important Memorandum from the Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas ) to the Kings, Presidents and Ministers Meeting at Sharm al-Sheikh, 13 March 1996, Document 5 in the Appendix to Hroub (2000).
13. Huda Naeem reported in *The Guardian* (London), 18 February 2006.
14. As presciently noted by David Macey (2000: 478). The *Critique* appeared only a year before *The Wretched of the Earth*, but Fanon had met and conversed at length with Sartre at this time. And the Sartrean position, albeit through many of its own detours, had always privileged struggle as the ultimate truth, as an essence in itself. See one of the loveliest of Sartre's essays, published originally in 1946, 'Materialism and Revolution', and collected in Sartre (1968: 238).

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